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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Transhumance Revisited: On Mobility and Process Between Ethnography and History

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Abstract

This paper advances the argument that transhumance, the seasonal movement of pastoral people and their livestock, is a useful site for critical reflection on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) and its importance to the understanding of mobility and process. It does so by bringing into dialogue ethnographic and historical perspectives on the resonance between transhumance and Deleuzian configurations of both nomadism and relations between human and non-human animals. It concludes that adjacent juxtaposition and syncretic ordering of diversity, rather than any ontological reconstruction, may be key to a more effective engagement with the complexities of contemporary existence.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The movement of sheep toward the Despoblat de Santa Creu de Llagunes, an abandoned village on the saddle of a pass out of the Pallars Sobirà, in the Catalan Pyrenees, precipitated the argument advanced in this paper. As William Cronon (2009) has observed, 'sheep are good to think with' (ix).

Mobility and process are increasingly important to understanding the organisation of contemporary existence. The transformation of that which was once regarded as solid into fluid and mutable is not just a defining historical feature, but also a resource for the development of a more effective critical apparatus (Urry, 2007). In this context, the importance attached to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) grows, but not everyone is persuaded about the merits of Deleuzian assumptions about the nature of the transformative processes involved. As Slavoj Žižek (1999) puts it, 'it is much more crucial to focus on what remains the same in this global fluidity ... on what serves as the very motor of this fluidity' (354); see also (Cresswell, 2006). This paper proposes that transhumance, the seasonal movement of pastoral people and their livestock, may be a useful site of critical reflection on Deleuzian configurations of mobility and process, particularly with respect to two pivotal Deleuzian concepts, 'nomadic thought' and 'becoming-animal'. These concepts are especially resonant because they link movement and the transformation of fundamental assumptions about the organisation of human existence; see also (Cresswell, 2006, pp. 49–50) and (Urry, 2007, pp. 26–29).

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Transhumance and reflection on the organisation of human existence are not wholly unrelated. Thirty years ago, in his contribution to James Clifford and George Marcus' *Writing Culture*, Renato Rosaldo (1986) referred to the practice to characterise his understanding of ethnographic sensibility. Drawing on Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie's historical ethnography and E. E. Evans-Pritchard's reflections on ethnographic method, Rosaldo argued that transhumant movement offered a helpful analogy to understand the ambiguities of such sensibility. He wrote that, if the ethnographic gaze is caught between the observation of diversity and the search for meaning, then:

Ethnographers' career itineraries can half-seriously, half playfully be likened to the patterned movements of transhumant pastoralists, rather than of nomads (tourists) or peasants (missionaries and colonial officials) (p. 96).

Since Rosaldo's words were written, reflection on the construction of culture has embraced mobility and process, shifting its focus from attribution to the transmission and circulation of meaning (Lee & LiPuma, 2002); see also (Gaonkar & Povinelli, 2003). At the same time, the importance of the warning against falling prey to either the tourist's passing observation of exotic forms of life or the colonial official's investment in disclosing the rules and regulations shaping these same forms of life remains undiminished. If multispecies ethnography is one of the more recent, new declensions of the ethnographic gaze, and if it seems especially attuned to Deleuzian processes of transformation, its proponents also acknowledge that such gaze has long been attentive to non-human animals and the latter's importance to understanding cultural change (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010); see also (Kirksey, Schuetze, & Helmreich, 2015). One cannot but wonder then whether the allure of things new may not deceive the observer of contemporary culture, so that returning to forgotten encounters with movement and relations between human and non-human animals may prove more instructive about the transformation of pivotal conceptual categories.¹ If transhumance answers the challenge, attaching such significance to the practice is not a novel claim because Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2012) has already detailed its importance to the explication of Deleuzian concepts, but the aims and conclusions drawn here are different. Here, transhumance, especially as it relates to the seasonal movement of sheep, is not just the site of renewed reflection on the ambiguities of ethnographic method, but also the site of critical reflection on the importance of such ambiguities to an empirically grounded engagement with the many questions about humans, non-human animals and the movement of historical transformation that Deleuzian understanding of mobility and process would seem to pose; see also (Aldred, 2012), (Watts, 2013) and (Despret & Meuret, 2016).

The paper advances these claims about transhumance in three parts. The first of these opens by offering a basic introduction to this pastoral practice and a history of critical considerations about its importance to economic and anthropological theory. Drawing on connections forged in the course of recent celebrations of transhumance, this part then offers an equally basic introduction to 'becoming-animal' and 'nomadic thought', focusing particularly on the two chapters of *A Thousand Plateaus* where these two concepts are first introduced (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, pp. 232–309 and 351–423).² The second part of the paper draws on Marco Aime, Stefano Allovio and Pier Paolo Viazzo's *Sapersi Muovere* (2001) and Ignasi Ros Fontana's *La Transhumància Andorrana* (2004). These two studies examine the evolution of shepherding in the Pallars Sobirà and in the Valle Stura, in the Maritime Alps. Insofar as these studies can be read as ethnographic records, the paper argues that they lend considerable substance to the Deleuzian concepts at issue, particularly as transhumant practice touches on both interactions of human and non-human animals, and the movement of assembled of human and non-human actors across geo-political landscapes. Insofar as these studies can also be read as historical narrative, however, they serve to cast a critical light on becoming-animal and nomadic thought. The history of transhumance in and around the Valle Stura and the Pallars Sobirà suggests that these concepts may also be prey to romanticism, deaf to the social and economic determination of relations between humans, non-human animals and their collective movements. The closing section of this second part examines how the question thus posed about the relationship between ethnography and history is written upon the sheep's body. In the third and final part of the paper, these diverse perspectives are brought together, but not in any synthetic mode. The paper attends instead to contemporary mobilisations of transhumance among a new generation of political activists who are intent upon constructing an alternative to contemporary economic

conditions and so reviving the communities that once sustained this pastoral practice. These activists' endeavours would appear to call into question a key tradition of cultural materialism, namely its opposition of cultural representation and historical process. The paper closes by drawing on these endeavours, proposing that adjacency and syncretism, rather than synthesis, may be key to understanding the complexities of contemporary existence; see also (Rabinow, 2008) and (Law et al., 2014).

2 | PART 1: TRANSHUMANCE, NOMADIC THOUGHT AND BECOMING ANIMAL

2.1 | Situating transhumance

Transhumant movement can be regarded as a form of nomadic pastoralism (Fernandez-Gimenez & Le Febre, 2006). Most basically, it involves the movement of people and their livestock between summer and winter pastures, aiming to secure grazing throughout the year. This movement can be further qualified as either vertical, as in the 'lesser' transhumant movement between valley floors and neighbouring uplands, or horizontal, as in the 'greater' transhumant movement between distant agro-ecological regions. Often, only the livestock and the men tending to them travel between summer and winter pastures. Women and children remain in one of the two places, or they move from a third, central place, partaking in only one of the two movements. Strikingly, transhumant movement of livestock is no longer evident in the United Kingdom, even in regions that are agro-ecologically very similar to the Valle Stura and the Pallars Sobirà. The practice seems to have disappeared sometime in the early modern period, as a mode of existence that was incompatible with the accelerating enclosure of common lands; see (Winchester, 2000) and (Fox, 2012), but also (Wmffre & Jones, 2004). In the United Kingdom, attention shifted from the management of movement between pastures to the livestock itself, in its species existence (Franklin, 2007, pp. 69–72). Agro-ecological adaptation may then be less important to the fortunes of transhumance than the contingencies of history; see also (Weisiger, 2009).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the difficulties involved in these definitions of transhumance once prompted Fernand Braudel (1972), pre-eminent historian of the *longue durée*, to warn against being too taken by any one of them (pp. 88; see also 85–102). Such understanding is inseparable from the attention economists and anthropologists devoted to the practice during the first half of the twentieth century, tracing in the process some key developments in critical commentary on the evolution of modern social organisation more generally. Thus, in a pioneering study of the Mesta, the guild regulating the ownership of sheep and the trading of wool in medieval Castile, the American economist Julius Klein (1920) argued that the rights of passage enabling transhumant movement stifled the development of agriculture and the modernisation of the nascent Spanish state. As a result, sheep and wool fuelled the growth of the modern capitalist economy in the United Kingdom, rather than in equally rich Spain; see also (Sanz, 1998, pp. 65–72). For their part, German and British anthropologists such as Fritz Krüger (1939) and Emrys Evans (1940) were attracted to contemporaneous transhumant movement in an out of the Pyrenees, as the remainders of a pre-historic mode of organising human existence (on Krüger, see also (Deutschmann, 1992) and (Fontana, 2001, pp. 26–30)). From the 1950s onward, transhumance seems to have become a subject of increasing public interest, captured in publications such as *National Geographic Magazine*; see (Line, 1950) and (Moyal & Coen, 1952); also (Fabre & Lebaudy, 2002) and (Lebaudy, Fabre, Martini, & Rosso, 2012, pp. 74–6). More recently, recollections of transhumance and its past have been mobilised to revitalise rural economies across the arc from the Alps to the Pyrenees, as well as served to articulate a new, post-humanist culture. As Théâtre du Centaure put it in 2013, in the manifesto for TransHumance, a theatrical performance developed for the celebrations of Marseille as European Capital of Culture:

*The clouds of dust we raise will incorporate dust from other movements and migrations, both past and future. It will be you, it will be me, but actually it will be us. I want to be a herd of animals – moving, swept along, united.*³

These words, inspired by the movement of sheep across the Crau, one of the few remaining steppes anywhere in the European continent, open a space for critical inquiry into Deleuzian notions of nomadic thought and becoming-animal.

2.2 | Nomadic thought and becoming-animal

If Deleuzian perspectives are important to contemporary thought about mobility and process, this is due to Gilles Deleuze's distinctive affirmation of differentiation as the fundamental feature of the world. Such affirmation is important to how one should understand key Deleuzian concepts, especially as they relate to the growing sense that movement transforms the very nature of things.

Deleuze regards existing modes of critical reflection as failing in the task of enabling thought to engage with the world, in all its proliferating diversity. Narrative is the primary instrument of such reflection, he observes, but it is orientated inwardly, its parts only existing and being meaningful in relation to the whole, the reality supposedly reproduced by text and discourse. Even where these narratives seek to represent an element of the external world, this element is rendered intelligible by its collocation within text and discourse. As a result, lines are drawn between world, text and discourse, and in a manner such that the world, in and of itself, becomes wholly inaccessible. The poet's aphoristic writing, on the other hand, seeks to break the hold of narrative by overcoming the division between text, discourse and the world. The poet understands that, rather than representing, the task is to put language in motion and so participate in the production of the world. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and his sometime collaborator Félix Guattari turn to the figure of the 'nomad' to articulate the implications of this alternative understanding of language and thought. Importantly, Paul Patton (2006) has observed that the status of nomadism in Deleuze and Guattari's articulation of their argument has proven a matter of considerable debate because, on their understanding, nomadism is neither a historical phenomenon, nor a metaphorical device; see also (Kaplan, 1996) and (Miller, 1998). The proposal advanced here is that nomadism is understood best as something like an 'enactment' (Law & Urry, 2004).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, properly philosophical thought is the realm of the nomadic thinker, he or she who is intent on crossing boundaries and expanding the creative domain of such thought. Like the nomad on the open steppe, the nomadic thinker moves on a direct collision course with the static and institutionalised thought associated with the state apparatus, this being the principle of organisation that marks out borders, erects boundaries and creates inner spaces. These are not just juridical and political spaces, but textual and discursive as well: Truth and orthodoxy are the state apparatus' stock in trade. Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari's nomads do not passively inhabit the steppe. The nomad is a principle of movement and transformation, a principle of exteriority wholly indifferent to the boundaries laid down by the state apparatus. Its habitat grows along trajectories that trace ever-receding limits. As a result, when viewed from the perspective of the state apparatus, the nomad cannot but be regarded as violent and destructive. On its own terms, however, the nomad is simply the creative movement of life itself. In a similar vein, nomadic thought frees the space for novelty. It is a mode of creativity that is simultaneously a mode of struggle and resistance to the impositions of truth and orthodoxy.

In their further reflections on nomadic thought, Deleuze and Guattari also criticise conventional understanding of the relationship between majorities and minorities, paving the way for the articulation of 'becoming-animal'. When the state apparatus configures the polity and its parts into majority and minorities, it does so in a manner such that, when subordinate groups invoke the notion of the people, it always refers to a minority, whatever its number might be. As a result, the revolutionary task is to summon the missing people. Importantly, if revolutionary upsurge emerges from within minority groups, this is because the transformation is catalysed by existence in constrained circumstances, not by the group's identity. Deleuze and Guattari turn to patriarchy to illustrate this structure and its transformation. While there may be more women than men, men still constitute the majority, and the transformation of the situation obtains when men and women join forces, sharing in the task of 'becoming-minority', or, to put the matter otherwise, when men and women join forces, sharing in the task of 'becoming-woman' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 275). Tellingly, this notion has generated some disagreement because it would seem to deflect attention away from sexual difference, to the detriment of feminist politics. As Elizabeth Grosz (2005) observes, however, the disagreement rests on a shared, tacit framing of difference as an ordered and determinate relationship. From a Deleuzian perspective, such enclosure of bodies and the movement of differentiation should be understood instead as an effect of the state apparatus. Similarly, the overturning of the other fundamental framing operated by the state apparatus, the distinction

between the human and the animal, illustrates the further implications of the revolutionary upsurge in which the process of becoming-minority partakes. The process of becoming-animal entails neither the animalisation of the human, nor the humanisation of the animal, but the emergence of the 'beast' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 279). Like the nomad, the beast is a disruptive figure that serves to free the space of creative thought, to thus advance the tasks of becoming-molecular, becoming-imperceptible and, ultimately, becoming-revolutionary.

It is no surprise then that the authors of the manifesto for TransHumance, *Théâtre du Centaure*, should have taken the figure of the centaur, half man-half horse, for their namesake; see also (Thompson, 2005). At the same time, this post-humanist rendition of transhumance seems far removed from the movement of sheep toward the ruins at Santa Creu de Llagunes. The next part of the paper responds to the tension between these two configurations of sheep on the move.

3 | PART 2: MODES OF ORDERING

The mutual dependence of shepherds and their sheep is such that a herd on the move is best regarded as a complex assembly of heterogeneous components, a veritable 'assemblage' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, pp. 503–5); see also (Despret & Meuret, 2016). It is no surprise therefore that Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2012) should argue that such herds serve very usefully to clarify Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's distinctive understanding of mobility and process. Strikingly, he draws on Valentina De Marchi's ethnographic study of ovine transhumance in the Triveneto, an area that spans across the Veneto, Trentino and Friuli Venezia Giulia administrative regions of Italy, to advance the argument. This is important because the movements thus traced occur within the confines and interstices of the juridico-political state and so are doubly removed from the techno-scientific sites that the development of multispecies ethnography would appear to privilege.⁴ This second part of the paper extends Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos's argument. It does so by turning to two studies that combine ethnographic observation with historical investigations of transhumance, Marco Aime, Stefano Allovio and Pier Paolo Viazzo's *Sapersi Muovere* (2001) and Ignasi Ros Fontana's *La Transhumància Andorrana* (2004). As observed earlier, such methodological combination allows for an exploration of the merits and limitations of Deleuzian understanding of mobility and process, at least insofar as it relates to the nomad's movement and the ontology of becoming-animal.

3.1 | Deleuzian mobilities

Sapersi Muovere and *La Transhumància Andorrana* lend Deleuzian readings of transhumance much support by detailing both intricate relationships between human and non-human animals, and complex movements across geo-political landscapes.

Firstly, shepherds' life and livelihood depend on ovine grazing habits and reproductive cycles, but these habits and cycles are far from fixed. Shepherds constantly modify their herds by selecting rams and ewes to fit their requirements, including the timing of reproduction. Their aim is to achieve an ever-smoother fit with farmers and other agricultural producers' seasonal requirements, particularly as these relate to the improvement of soil and tilth. Significantly, the development of sheep capable of prospering when overwintered on higher ground not only facilitated British abandonment of transhumance, but also attests to the power of such modification. It is not just ovine habits and reproductive cycles that are subject to modification, however. Even the timing of shepherds' marriages and reproduction must be managed to fit with the requirements of transhumance.

Secondly, the controlled movement of transhumant herds involves the management of relations between not just human and non-human animals, but also between different non-human animal species. Most notably, dogs drive the movement of sheep, but it is goats, as well as selected rams and sheep, that ensure appropriate responses to the dogs driving the herd and that control the herd's meandering when dogs and shepherds are absent. Such fine tuning across species requires, among other things, the choosing and domesticating of one goat or sheep among many others to

help in the task of movement, so much so that knowledge of each animal individually is a recurrent trope of commentary upon pastoral skill. As a Piedmontese shepherd observes, contrasting his and his interviewer's more abstract knowledge of sheep:

We knew each and every sheep. They may resemble each other, but they really don't because no two are the same (Aime, Allovio, & Viazzo, 2001, p. 209).

While there can be little doubt that the life of a transhumant shepherd is a hard life, it is then unsurprising that the photographs and poems preserved in the Maison de la Transhumance (Association Maison de la Transhumance, n.d.) should evoke a much more than a simply utilitarian relationship between shepherds, sheep and other animals. In fact, recollections of the shepherd's harsh life are often tinged with melancholia for a lost, caring relationship with their sheep. As another shepherd, this time a Catalan shepherd, puts it:

I travel to France frequently and when I see a herd, when I go past some place between here and the Ariège, if I see a herd, I stop. 'Leave it be' says my son. Even if it's just one, I still stop. 'Leave it be - he says - haven't you seen enough sheep?' He doesn't ... He doesn't much care. You understand me, don't you? (Fontana, 2004, p. 202).

In other words, shepherds' care for the animals to which they tend is not a wholly economic and utilitarian affair, but also an intimate relationship, individuated and aesthetic.

Thirdly, the movement of the resulting multispecies assemblage is not random, but driven by the search for pasture. As Aime and his colleagues observe, grazing is subject to contractual agreements with private and public landowners, and shepherds sometimes act collectively to secure the most remunerative contract possible. Transhumant movement itself, however, is a competition to travel along untouched roadside verges. Furthermore, it is not easy to stop a herd straying from such verges onto nearby fields and vineyards. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the regulation of transhumant movement is important to the operations of the territorial nation-state. This is not limited to the resolution of conflicts between shepherds, farmers and other landowners. The movement of animals across boundaries of regional and national jurisdictions, a movement of animals whose ownership, number and health is not always certain, has also often proven a source of conflict. To a lesser extent, the same goes for accompanying movement of children of school age and youths subject to requirements of national service. It is therefore unsurprising that the transhumant shepherds Aime and his colleagues have studied acquired the name *gratta*, thieves. If the movement of transhumant shepherds is driven by a ceaseless, hungry search for pasture, the animal drive it instantiates pays scant regard to the lines that the state apparatus seeks to draw upon the landscape. As Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2012) puts it:

The desire of the animal to be fed reigns supreme. This determines an immanent regime of territorial presence that defies property lines while silently drawing its own lines of stasis, hushed flows of pause and revolt carved on the fabric of the earth. This law is intricately linked to its space of appearance to the extent that any differentiation between the two would be artificial (p. 448).

The spatial demarcations, transgressions and conflicts that transhumant herds on the move thus precipitate also recall Deleuze and Guattari's observation that, when viewed from the perspective of the state apparatus, the nomad is violent and destructive, but on its own terms, the nomad is simply the personification of movement itself, the movement of life itself.

3.2 | Historicising movement

If the ethnographic perspective on transhumant herds suggests that they are complex assemblages that serve usefully to clarify Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the relationship between movement and the nature of things, the contemporary, renewed interest in transhumance is also tied to the fate of rural communities across the Alps and

Pyrenees. This section of the paper turns to the relationship between these two perspectives, caught between the visibility of the grazing sheep and reverberations of the abandoned ruins through which these same sheep sometimes meander, when able to get through fences around the like of the Despoblat de Santa Creu de Llagunes.

The first question concerns the spaces through which transhumant herds move. *Sapersi Muovere* could be read as proposing that the space running from the Provençal to the Padan plain was once unbroken, the closure of transalpine passage during winter months being the only exception, and that the institutions of the nation-state increasingly regulated this space, to the detriment of transhumance. *La Transhumància Andorrana* suggests, however, that the contingencies of history may be more important to the shaping the fate of transhumance, at least as it unfolded in the space encompassing the Provençal and Aragonese plains. It seems that, around the end of the nineteenth century, the expansion of irrigation in the latter plain raised the cost of renting winter pasture, and that it did so at the same time as viticulture became more important to the economy of the Languedoc. As a result, French farmers increasingly encouraged transhumant movement away from Aragon, toward their own side of the Pyrenees, to fertilise their increasingly remunerative vineyards. They continued to do so until French sheep breeders became restive and called upon the French state to halt the movement. None of this was decisive, however, until the Second World War made movement across the Pyrenees increasingly difficult, driving many transhumant shepherds to settle in France. Finally, the fate of transhumance in the Catalan Pyrenees was sealed by agricultural subsidies for wheat and wool. These subsidies not only rendered upland farming uneconomical and thus undermined the related lesser transhumance, but they also shifted the economic balance in favour of the greater transhumance across the Alps, rather than the Pyrenees. Transhumant shepherds certainly constituted a cosmopolitan community, but it most likely that their mingling took place in Arles, in and around the Bar du Marché, where most contracts between shepherds and breeders were agreed, rather than on the alpine pastures conjured in *Sapersi Muovere*. As Fontana observes, transhumance is no immemorial practice, but a historical institution (Fontana, 2004, p. 9 and 33).

The second question concerns the transhumant shepherd's life. Both *Sapersi Muovere* and *La Transhumància Andorrana* convey an understanding of this life as lonely and far from economically rewarding. Often, the transhumant shepherd lived no better than the animals tended. One might wish to disregard the possibility that the sheep may have been valued more than the shepherds themselves, but one cannot ignore the shame involved in remembering the life lived because, as Fontana observes, it constitutes a major source of difficulty for the reconstruction of transhumant forms of life. As one shepherd put it:

I've also had to sleep in the open with the flock, and I'm not ashamed, no; there are many people who find it shameful to say 'I have looked after sheep'. I do not bend my head in shame (Fontana, 2004, p. 14).

If the life of the transhumant shepherd is akin to a becoming-animal, and the shepherd approximates the beast, it is not clear how one is to make sense of the shame associated with the beast's life. One might need to think of shame as the product of a historically specific configuration of subjectivity, or, alternatively, one might consider whether the notion of becoming-animal is not overly romantic. As Aime and his colleagues have argued, the understanding of life in the mountains has long been coloured by the primitivism of the romantic imagination. It is perhaps telling that the phrase 'fame d'erba', which lends De Marchi's study its title and provokes Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos' analysis, originated with similarly entitled poem, in which the sheep's hunger for grass, innocent and immemorial, stands as an alternative to humanity's acquisitive instincts, violent and destructive (Bini & Vicquery, 1979). Such primitivism is not to be dismissed lightly because it has long coloured the history of ethnographic method.

The third and final question concerns the very practices of remembering transhumance. If the questions raised thus far about the importance of this pastoral practice to the clarification of pivotal Deleuzian concepts owe mostly to the conflation of nomadism and transhumance, differentiating the two is far from easy. For example, the material collected in the Maison Pyrénéenne du Pastoralisme, an interpretative centre intent on securing the cultural and economic valorisation of pastoral life in the Midi-Pyrenees, proposes that the complexities of pastoralism are best understood by comparing how the movement of livestock and its wardens is 'declensed in different regions of France and across the world'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the world is defined by the confines of

francophone Africa. More importantly, however, the space of the interpretative centre is divided into a section dedicated to the local practice of transhumance, and another section dedicated instead to nomadism and the life of the Touareg, who are also described as the 'children of the clouds'. In both cases, the stated aim of movement is to secure grazing throughout the year, but whereas the former activity is defined in strictly economic terms, the latter is defined in classically ethnological terms, tying the organisation of daily life to family structure and the bonds of kinship. While the Maison Pyrénéenne du Pastoralisme would thus appear to renew a colonial perspective on the movement of people and livestock, such entanglement inflects even those practices of commemoration that would aspire to overcome the history of such distinctions. Thus, *Sapersi Muovere* opens with the following confession:

[We] have undertaken anthropological studies in Africa, being shaped by a research tradition that must necessarily privilege oral sources over written ones, which are fragmentary, if at all existent. If this background would appear ill-suited to undertake anthropological studies within alpine regions, it also furnishes themes and paradigms little known within alpine anthropology. Moving 'as if' we were in an exotic village, we have sought to adopt, by exploiting our Africanist experience, that removed gaze the anthropologist often requires ... (Aime et al., 2001, p. 9).

This detached perspective allows the authors to advance the post-colonial argument that the examination of life in the most disparate peripheral communities can inform each other precisely insofar as these communities share in the experience of being situated on periphery. It is not clear, however, to what extent such detachment may also blind the authors to the distinctive history of the transhumant communities they study and its consequences. Viewed in the optic of the *longue durée*, the visibility of sheep and transhumant shepherds across the arc from the Catalan Pyrenees to the Maritime Alps is inseparable from a global market for wool. Despite Julius Klein's formative analysis, the abandonment of transhumance was no necessary stage within a trajectory of agricultural modernisation, but the result of choices between alternative modes of securing the same outcome, namely the maximisation of profit from ovine production. Where the British producers sought to improve the quantity and quality of their output by focusing primarily on sheep in their species existence, their Spanish counterparts focused instead on the movement of herds and its more effective regulation. Either way, the wool produced was never able to resist the onslaught of cotton and then synthetic textiles, eventually driving ovine production to the margins of the global agricultural economy. As a result, many areas that specialised in such production have experienced severe depopulation and abandonment. At best, such areas are now repositories of a long lost pastoral past, but, as the preceding discussion has sought to explain, returning this past to memory is an exercise fraught with difficulty.

3.3 | The past and its traces

The fraught relationship between ethnographic and historical perspectives on the movement of transhumant herds is sometimes written into the very flesh of the animals moved.

The fortunes of the Pecora Sambucana, an ovine breed peculiar to the Valle Stura, are inseparable from the recollection of the past which *Sapersi Muovere* seeks to return to historical memory; see (Lebaudy, 2011) and (Lebaudy et al., 2012, pp. 157–66). Local authorities hope that consumption of Agnello Sambucano, the Pecora Sambucana made flesh, will help to renew the valley's economy. This said, one of chief challenges confronting the enterprise has been how to promote the consumption of lamb and mutton, because, historically, it is very limited. Thus, when these authorities supported the creation of a consortium to promote the Pecora Sambucana, they also lent their support to the establishment of ecomuseum dedicated to the commemoration of shepherding, the Ecomuseo della Pastorizia (Biffi, 2014). The ecomuseum's photographic exhibitions provide the required, distinctive backstory by linking the consumption of ovine meat and cheese to a slower, lost world of transhumant shepherds, a link that visitors are able to create by themselves, by dining in the restaurant associated with the ecomuseum, the Pecora Nera, the Black Sheep. Strikingly, however, sheep are largely absent from Clemens Kalischer's photographic record of life

in the area; see (Audisio & Cordero, 1996). The reason for such dissonance is that shepherds captured in the photographs on display in the ecomuseum did not obtain their livelihood from any local herds, but by moving Merino d'Arles sheep belonging to breeders in and around the Crau. Ironically, upon their return to the mountains, these shepherds were sometimes given a lamb, partly as payment and partly as a gift, a lamb which they then sought to cross with their own sheep and whose results are now to be undone, to recover the real and authentic past of the communities described in *Sapersi Muovere*. As such, the Pecora Sambucana is best regarded as yet another 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm, 1983); see also (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000). Such invention is not wholly inconsequential for the argument advanced here since focus on the sheep courts deflection away from critical examination of a forgotten mode of existence and the dynamics of its commemoration, toward the dynamics of contemporary techno-scientific culture; see (Luparia, 2000) and (Colombino & Giaccaria, 2015). Viewed from this perspective, the Pecora Sambucana could even be considered the latest in a long line of ovine 'coloniser[s]' (Lebaudy, 2011, p. 75).

4 | PART 3: CRITICAL AND EFFECTIVE HISTORIES?

Despite the complexities involved in the commemoration of pastoralism, the many ecomuseums that are dedicated to the subject and that are scattered across the Alps and Pyrenees produce what might be regarded as critical and effective histories (Foucault, 1977); also (Dean, 1994).

Perhaps illustrating Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's call to put language in motion, these repositories of local memories seek to animate the past by bringing it into the present and putting it to work. They do so by serving very usefully to support schools and social enterprises that are today attracting young people, not just from alpine communities, but also removed urban centres, to a life on the move, in the company of animals. This is how two graduates of one such school, the Escola de Pastors de Catalunya, summarise the nature of shepherding as a form of work and a relation between humans, sheep and landscape:

It is another life! It is a quiet work, at a different pace. It's not the eight hours of salaried work. You may have to work twelve hours, but at your own pace and as you wish. You get to know each sheep, you see how they grow and you become attached to them. It's different ...

If you pay attention, you begin to understand the sheep's movements and become one with the flock: you look for the places where the grazing is better, you understand what they seek, where they will move, intuiting what will happen next, and all this because you are simply there. It is a very strange kind of connection because you suddenly start to feel as if you are one of them and they part of both you and the landscape (Ahumada, 2013, p. 25 and 30).

The memories of a pastoral past, as well as the imaginary of becoming-animal and nomadic thought, that sustain such renewal may be prey to the romanticism to which *Sapersi Muovere* refers, and be blind to its alignment with the powers of capital which *La Transhumància Andorrana* outlines. At the same time, however, a documentary about the future of agriculture and featuring the Escola de Pastors de Catalunya suggests that the questions the new shepherds pose about the nature of shepherding and the relationship between different forms of life are worthy of a 'political science seminar' (Projecte Gripià, 2013); see also (Monllor, 2013a), (Monllor, 2013b). These new shepherds test the historical opposition between the romantic imagination and economic relations by creating and exploiting novel economic opportunities, within and without the confines of the nation-state. Paradoxically, they do so by mobilising their own version of the Pecora Sambucana, the Oveja Xisqueta, to reassert the importance of the very wool and woollen textiles whose production and trade progressively drove the Pallars Sobirà to the margins of the global agricultural economy. The ultimate goal is to reconnect the production and consumption of wool and woollen garments in a manner such that capital is retained locally, so renewing otherwise dying local communities; see also (Mármol & Vaccaro, 2015). In other words, these new shepherds seek to forge alternative regimes of mobility whereby it is no longer the

shepherds who move, to seek their livelihood elsewhere. It is instead the commodities produced and their consumers that move. The latter, including the tourist who ventured through the Despoblat de Santa Creu de Llagunes, are attracted to a spatialised and locally embedded romantic imaginary, and not just to the wool, but also the cheese and meat they purchase from the new shepherds, which enables them to consume the lifestyle at a distance; see also (Colombino & Giaccaria, 2015) and (Goodman, 2016). The new shepherds would thus appear to also ask whether the opposition between ethnographic visibilities and the weight of history rehearsed above is either necessary or desirable. The trick is to find ways of holding on to both.⁵ As such, the contemporary reconfiguration of transhumant pastoralism might help us to think syncretically, to think in terms of proximities and adjacencies, rather than the historical sequences, syntheses and overcoming that may tacitly shape much of our understanding of mobilities and process.

5 | CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on connections between transhumance, mobility and process, aiming to articulate the difficulties involved in thinking about the present moment. The defining issue has been how best to navigate between the clarity of philosophical argument, specifically as it relates to Gilles Deleuze's distinctive understanding of mobility and process, and the messiness that is the stuff of ethnographic observation and historical narrative. The challenge confronted is far from novel.

In *Marking Time* (2008), Paul Rabinow, the anthropologist of the contemporary, introduces 'adjacency' as a mode of critical engagement with the present moment (pp. 33–50); see also (Rabinow, 2003, pp. 57–75). In this mode, multiple objects of study are juxtaposed in a manner that neither denies the distance between the observer and the observed, nor admits that the observations must therefore be untrue to the phenomena themselves. The accounts of the present moment produced in this mode are critical because they are disinterested, in the sense that the interests at issue are different to those motivating the actors observed. They are effective insofar as the juxtapositions capture readers' interests, drawing their attention to unexpected connections and the possibility of a different understanding of the world around them. Rabinow seeks to clarify this alternative critical mode by drawing on Deleuze's distinction between potential and virtual states:

This anthropological practice is characterized by what might be called a mode of virtual untimeliness. Let me explain. The difference between a mode of potentiality and what Deleuze has called a mode of virtuality consists in the fact that potentiality actualizes a state, a quality, or a form that is already inherent or resident in the being, thing, or process under consideration. The mode of virtuality does not directly partake of this metaphysical world. It operates adjacent to it, moving along side potentialities and actualities so that these can be taken up and refracted on another form. In another mode. That is to say, the virtual as opposed to the potential is a mode replete with real things and processes but redirected, removed from their habitual courses (pp. 49–50).

Rabinow has long been interested in Deleuze, but there is room to doubt that his intention is to import into ethnographic practice any philosophical reflection upon ontological structure.⁶ These words are better understood as a call to develop an alternative mode of representation that will afford a space in which critical reflection is combined with openness to the complexity and heterogeneity of the phenomenal world, the very openness that positions Deleuze as one of the most compelling contemporary thinkers.

On this reading of Rabinow's reconstruction of the critical enterprise, there can be little doubt that Rabinow remains caught up in the construction of meaning, and it perhaps important to recall that, like Renato Rosaldo, Rabinow was a contributor to *Writing Culture* (Rabinow, 1986). If the mode of reflection on the organisation of contemporary culture has shifted from construction to circulation and transfiguration, Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) has sought to lend ontological weight to the shift; see also (Gaonkar & Povinelli, 2003) and (Povinelli, 2014). Yet, when Povinelli summarises her argument by referring to Martin Heidegger, who was wholly invested in the construction

of meaning, to assert the possibility of an ontological turn that opens onto process, it become unclear what is to be gained. On the one hand, the ontological turn certainly promises deeper engagement with arguably distinctive features of the present moment, but, on the other hand, as Povinelli herself acknowledges, any rigorously consistent embrace of such ontological perspective would seem to come at the cost of any investment in the contingency of existence and thus in the historical conditioning of the present moment. Returning to Rabinow, one then wonders whether the embrace of mobility and process amounts to a renewal of the *avant-garde* and its break with history that actually remained indebted to modernity and its defining narratives (Rabinow, 2003, pp. 57–75 and 122–136). Insofar as it involves complex interactions of human and non-human animals, as well as the movement of assembled human and non-human actors across geo-political landscapes, transhumance would seem to answer the difficulty, by allowing the analysis of mobility and process to move away from the centres where some of the most recent transformations of contemporary critical practice are forged.

The account of transhumance, mobility and process offered here suggests that there are good reasons to be wary of any ontological approach. The argument advanced perhaps echoes Michael Lynch's (2013) own response to the contemporary ontological turn, calling as he does for 'historical and ethnographic investigations of particular world-making and world-sustaining practices that do not begin by assuming a general picture of the world' (p. 444). At the same time, the argument has also sought to emphasise the fraught relationship between history and ethnography, exploring the possibility of moving beyond their traditional opposition. From this perspective, there is something very attractive about John Law, Geir Afdal, Kristin Asdal, Wen-yuan Lin, Ingunn Moser, Vicky Singleton's (2014) advocacy of syncretism. They write:

In its religious context, the term syncretism has been understood both as negative and positive. Negatively, it has been taken to connote sloppiness: a failure to be clear. It has been treated as a theologically and intellectually suspect eclecticism, as an attempt to throw everything into one pot. But positively, it has been understood as an expression of vitality, tolerance, and inclusiveness—as an indication of a fluid willingness and ability to draw on the power of many traditions by finding ways of holding them together. Religious syncretism has sometimes been accomplished hegemonically; notoriously, for instance, the early Christian church located its houses of worship on sites of pagan significance in order to tap into and domesticate the indigenous gods. But ... hegemony is not the only syncretic mode available. We need to explore the different ways in which these modes work and transmute them into a resource for thinking about how to do noncoherences well. There will be no analytical or normative guarantees, but then we have never been modern, and the guarantees that we once believed we had were always empty. There is no need to be scared, for if noncoherence is not incoherence, then neither is incomplete success a failure (p. 192).

What will come of this syncretic mode of engagement with the world is for the future to determine, but in the meantime, one could close by returning to Rabinow's insight that writing may have nothing to do with signifying, and, like the poet's writing, it is instead about mapping and promoting new ways of seeing and thinking, even projecting thought into regions still to come, but it will always be writing from this side, from this place, always already caught up in the messiness and contingencies of this one life. This perhaps is what the sight of a transhumant herd climbing toward the Despoblat de Santa Creu de Llagunes conveys to the present moment, caught irremediably between the past and the future.⁷

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ As with many contemporary discussions of mobility and process, Kirksey and Helmreich (2010) acknowledge their debt to *A Thousand Plateaus*, but, drawing on Donna Haraway's criticism of Deleuze and Guattari, they also admit to ambivalence about its failure to engage with the 'real' animals that populate contemporary techno-scientific culture. It is not clear what is the understanding of reality marked out by such distinction. For an introduction to Haraway's and Deleuze's contrasting understanding of animals, see Beaulieu (2011).
- ² The place of *A Thousand Plateaus* in the Deleuzian philosophical corpus is discussed in Adkins (2015). The reading of the two chapters considered here is indebted most immediately to Goh (2009) and Laurie (2015). Strikingly, Deleuze and Guattari do not refer to sheep in any of their discussions of nomadism, but they do refer to the nomads' use of felt, rather than spun and woven wool, as important to their overall argument (pp. 475–7). See also the reference to the nomads' 'woolly polymorphism' (p. 557).
- ³ These evocative words were posted on the on the website for the celebrations, no longer active or archived. For the current rendition of the manifesto, see Le Théâtre du Centaure (n.d.). Arguably, events to which Le Théâtre du Centaure contributes illustrate a greater preoccupation with pastoral, rather than the ecological constructions of multi-species assemblages that are explored in contemporary bio-art; see Kirksey et al. (2015). The contrast would appear to rehearse the divergent paths taken by ecomuseums over the past three decades, divided as these institutions are between socio-cultural and ecological understanding of landscape; see Davis (2011).
- ⁴ Arguably, Anna Tsing's (2015) study of the cultures that have developed around mushrooms is an exception to the understanding of multispecies ethnography as privileging techno-scientific sites. On the other hand, Georg Dietzler's 'Self-decomposing laboratory' (2010), which also attends to the transformative capacities of fungal cultures, raises questions about the distance between practices of ecological remediation, to which Tsing draws attention, and contemporary techno-scientific culture.
- ⁵ An interview with Ignasi Ros Fontana, director of an ecomuseum that is involved in this enterprise of reanimating the past, suggests that he is able to advance the enterprise because he is not only aware of the tension between ethnography and history, but also that between the historical museum's investment in the past and the ecomuseum's orientation toward the future (interview with author, 13 July 2015). This tension is not unique. It was centrally important to both the institutional development of the ecomuseum and the evolution of the Ecomuseo della Pastorizia. Oscar Biffi (2013, 2014) argues that, if the Ecomuseo della Pastorizia has proven relatively successful, it is because it has privileged the needs of local producers over the call to become a repository of local memories. Local actors live with the tension between history and heritage, seeking to mobilize it to best advantage.
- ⁶ Rabinow would seem to have first discussed the utility of Deleuzian concepts in relation to the contemporary development of the life sciences; see (Rabinow, 1996). On Rabinow's aversion to ontological speculation, see (Rabinow, 1988) and (1999); also (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).
- ⁷ Possibly as a result of a formative engagement with pastoralism, Tim Ingold seem particularly attuned to the link between representation and the complexities of human existence in space and time. It is unfortunate that, although Ingold reflects very usefully on the relationship between history, anthropology and ethnographic method, he does not connect his understanding of the temporalities involved in the anthropologist's glance to Deleuzian and Bergsonian notions of simultaneity, despite his avowed debt to both modes of thought (Ingold, 2011, pp. 229–43); see also (Ingold, 1986). Such convergence on simultaneity deserves closer attention.

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